Metaphoricity, deliberateness, and conversation behaviours: a case study of behavioral patterns in the use of linguistic metaphors

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Data: Based on 19 triadic conversations produced by 57 participants, this paper examines behavioural patterns of subturns containing metaphors, deliberate metaphors, non-deliberate metaphors, and non-metaphors. Of 3,933 subturns, 822 contained metaphors, including 55 deliberate and 767 non-deliberate. Four behavioural variables potentially relevant to cognitive processing were examined: presence of filled pause, presence of gesture, duration of subturn, and duration of gap between sub-turns.

Methods: A series of Generalized Linear Mixed Models (GLMMs) were run, with word count having a random slope and conversation group as random intercept. The model on the duration of pause also had speaker change as a covariate.

Findings: Subturns with metaphors, both deliberate and non-deliberate, lasted significantly longer than non-metaphors. Subturns with metaphors, and non-deliberate metaphors were significantly more likely to contain filled pauses than non-metaphors. To examine the effect of filled pauses on the duration of subturns, an additional interaction model was run. Results revealed that Subturns with metaphors (both deliberate and non-deliberate) lasted significantly longer than non-metaphors when there was no filled pause in the subturn, but the differences were not significant when filled pauses were present. This indicates that the increase in duration was primarily driven by fluent rather than disfluent utterances. As both the increase in durations and presence of filled pauses are markers of processing difficulty (Berthold & Jameson, 1999; Müller et al., 2001), the results suggest that utterances containing metaphors impose a greater cognitive workload compared to those without metaphors. No significant results were found for the duration of gap or presence of gesture.

Implications: Utterances containing metaphors, deliberate metaphors, and non-deliberate metaphors are associated with distinct behavioural patterns, which highlights the role of metaphor presence and metaphor deliberateness in shaping speakers' conversation behaviors. Findings of the present study show that the production of metaphors poses greater cognitive challenges than literal expressions, as evidenced by longer duration of subturns and higher chances of disfluencies.

References

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